

THE SCARCE EARTH of McLAREN VALE

The McLaren Vale Scarce Earth project focuses on the quality and diversity of McLaren Vale shiraz. A key to that diversity is the wide range of soil types present in McLaren Vale and that, along with altitude and aspect, can influence aroma and flavour in an almost mystical way.

McLaren Vale, on the southern doorstep of the city of Adelaide, is a major focus of wine tourism, and the Scarce Earth project enlightens visitors to the patchwork nature of the region. For vintage 2014 a panel of six selected 15 single block wines to do just that.

I visited McLaren Vale last week, and tasted the fifteen with one of the panellists, Paul Carpenter, chief winemaker for Hardy's Tintara. With each review I've supplied basic geological and topographical information to help convey the geological differences that occur throughout the region. Much more is accessible at <https://mclarenvale.info/scarce-earth-wine-vintages/2014-vintage/>



Ngalinga formation

2014 Shingleback Unedited Shiraz The vivid colour is eye-catching, as is the intense blackberry nose with minimal oak influence. This is a very pure expression of shiraz, with fine tannins. It is poised and impressive. (\$79.95) ★★★★★ **24,000 bottles produced**

Soil: Grey-green and red-brown mottled clay up to five metres deep (Ngalinga formation)

Elevation: 60 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Hugh Hamilton Black Blood I Shiraz The colour is slightly advanced. A rich, ripe shiraz that is forward and sturdy, without the liveliness to lift it to a higher rating. (\$79.00) ★★★ **15,000 bottles**

Soil: Ngalinga formation

Elevation: 85 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Serafino Malpas Vineyard Shiraz The intense, vibrant blackberry aromas are the essence of the Vale, and are enhanced by a whiff of dark chocolate. This is a wine of excellent freshness and balance with just a touch of oak which adds to the long finish. (\$45.00)

★★★★☆ *1,500 bottles*

Soil: Ngalinga formation

Elevation: 60 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Battle of Bosworth Chanticleer Shiraz The aromas reflect ripeness but are still fresh enough. Some dark chocolate and tilled earth show on a generous palate with a “European” savoury edge. (\$45.00)

★★★★ *300 bottles*

Soil: Reddish brown to chocolate-brown clay and loam with abundant discontinuous lenses of gravel containing numerous small flat pebbles of bedrock (Christies Beach formation)

Elevation: 130 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Battle of Bosworth Ding's Shiraz Lightish colour. There's more red berry than black on the nose, with hints of earth. Palate-wise it's quite savoury, featuring fine tannins and a drying finish on which the earthiness persists. (\$45.00) ★★★★★ *300 bottles*

Soil: Christies Beach formation

Elevation: 100 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Battle of Bosworth Braden's Shiraz Colour again slightly advanced. Fresh Morello cherries, wild berries and orange peel are evident in the bouquet. The palate is elegant - not really full bodied in traditional regional terms, but still expressive. (\$45.00) ★★★★★ *300 bottles*

Soil: Christies Beach formation

Elevation: 70 metres

Aspect: Flat

2014 Gemtree Stage 6 Shiraz Very much at the ripe end of aromas even though it was picked comparatively early. The taste tends towards jamminess, with an acid spike on the finish. (\$50.00) ★★★ *3,200 bottles*

Soil: Clayey sandstone containing eroded fragments of coarse Maslin sands and scattered pebbles (Kurrajong formation)

Elevation: 163 metres

Aspect: North

2014 Coriole Galaxidia Shiraz The concentrated perfumed dark berry/cherry perfume is enhanced by hints of dried herbs. It's very much dark cherry on the long, fine, firm palate. The beautifully managed tannins linger. (\$55.00) ★★★★★ *1,200 bottles*

Soil: Thinly laminated dark grey siltstone (Tapley Hill formation)

Elevation: 150 metres

Aspect: Flat, with 15 degree north slope

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2014 Coriole Old House Shiraz Very much in the big, rich, traditional McLaren Vale blackberry style. Here we have the Vale in all its glory, offering freshness, power, length and structure with dry, savoury tannins. (\$55.00) ★★★★★ **1,200 bottles**

Soil: Tapley Hill formation

Elevation: 190 metres

Aspect: Flat, with 15 degree south slope

2014 d'Arenberg The Amaranthine Shiraz A vibrant and complex red offering intense dark berry, dried herbs and even a hint of dark chocolate. The delightful palate is long, fresh and fine. Possibly the best d'Arenberg wine I've ever tasted. (\$99.00) ★★★★★ **1,500 bottles**

Soil: Silica-rich, with fossilised sea life common (Blanche Point formation)

Elevation: 97 metres

Aspect: Eastern and undulating both north and south



Maslin sand (Orange-yellow layers)

2014 d'Arenberg The Bamboo Scrub Shiraz Vibrant aromas of blackberry with suggestions of graphite. An intense and firmly structured, but well balanced, red. (\$99.00) ★★★★★ **1,500 bottles**

Soil: Maslin sands

Elevation: 154 metres

Aspect: Slightly northerly

2014 d'Arenberg Shipsters' Rapture Shiraz Very powerful, but fresh, showing hints of Cherry Ripe© aroma. Powerful, long and dry, with plenty of McLaren Vale power. (\$99.00) ★★★★★ **1,500 bottles**

Soil: Blanche Point formation

Elevation: 93 metres

Aspect: Slight south-east undulation

2014 Shottesbrooke Tom's Block Shiraz Comparatively advanced colour. An earthy shiraz which is a little lean, lacking mid palate generosity. (\$50.00) ★★★ **3,900 bottles**

Soil: Maslin sands

Elevation: 195 metres

Aspect: North-east

2014 Wirra Wirra Whaite Old Block Shiraz The concentrated, high-toned dark berry aromas are attention-grabbing, and are enhanced by bouquet garni nuances. The palate is both opulent and elegant. A delightful McLaren Vale red to cellar. (\$130.00) ★★★★★ *500 bottles*

Soil: Maslin sands

Elevation: 200 metres

Aspect: Easterly

2014 Mr Riggs Scarce Earth Shiraz It's intense, but on the edge of prune. There's plenty of flavour and structure, but it's not quite as vibrant as some. (\$50.00) ★★★☆ *3,822 bottles*

Soil: Maslin sands

Elevation: 260 metres

Aspect: Northerly

In the judging of young red wines, bright colour and freshness of aroma and flavour are critical for good scores. Shiraz lacking brightness and depth of colour simply doesn't age well. When the colour fails to measure up, the aroma and flavour invariably show premature development. Some commentators may call that complexity, but it's complexity that leads to an early demise.

I assessed these wines with a view to the future because I've assumed that those who purchase them would do so with a view to cellaring. In my opinion, the ★★★★★ and ★★★☆ wines can be successfully aged in good conditions for at least a decade. However, if you wish to explore the terrains of McLaren Vale through young wines, this Scarce Earth set is the best place to start.

Initiatives like Scarce Earth play important roles in alerting consumers not just to the diversity of a region, but that wine made from single-site grapes can express both place and time. Sometimes that expression is sharp and clear. Other times it can be blurred by winemaker inputs, but it is vital to make crystal-clear the direct link from vine to wine. A considerable amount of Australian wine is blended to a style. The Scarce Earth wines are the complete opposite, as all connect with a clearly defined source. For the true wine enthusiast, that contributes a very desirable quality to wine – mystique.

Lester Jesberg

The panel convenes very soon for a feature tasting of Australia's finest rieslings.

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